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ABSTRACT

Methodological sophistication and conceptual complexity in the area of marital power has resulted in more questions than answers. The greatest danger of such a situation is a cessation of research motivated by fear of added mistakes, and supposedly justified by the lack of better measures and conceptualizations. Two particular stumbling blocks have been annoying differences between husbands' and wives' perceptions and low correlations between different measures of marital power. This study addresses both of these issues in two ways: (1) it reexamines some of our theoretical assumptions and empirical expectations; (2) it presents data which illustrate the advantages of utilizing measures which tap nontarget as well as targets concepts. In short, this paper should be viewed as one example of extracting new information from old and imperfect instruments. (Author)

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NEW WINE FROM OLD WINESKINS:

MARITAL POWER RESEARCH*

Robert J. Meyer and Robert A. Lewis**

ABSTRACT

Methodological sophistication and conceptual complexity in the area of marital power has resulted in more questions than answers. The greatest danger of such a situation is a cessation of research motivated by fear of added mistakes, and supposedly justified by the lack of better measures and conceptualizations. Two particular stumbling blocks have been annoying differences between husbands' and wives' perceptions and low correlations between different measures of marital power. This study addresses both of these issues in two ways: 1) it reexamines some of our theoretical assumptions and empirical expectations; 2) it presents data which illustrate the advantages of utilizing measures which tap non-target as well as target concepts. In short, this paper should be viewed as one example of extracting new information from old and imperfect instruments.

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INTRODUCTION

The growth of conceptual and methodological sophistication in the field of family studies has reached the point where we know how much we do not know. There is no better example of this than the domain of marital power. Since there have been several recent, extensive reviews of the marital power literature (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970; Olson and Rabunsky, 1972; Turk and Bell, 1972; Larson, 1974), another compilation would be redundant. However, even a casual glance at this literature makes evident the fact that we do not know what marital power is, and consequently we do not know how to measure it.

Most research on marital power has been limited to decision-making, but decision-making is at best only one dimension of a much more complex concept. Even decision-making becomes complicated when examined more closely. It can be subdivided into actual decisions, predicted decisions, process decisions and retrospective decisions (Olson and Rabunsky, 1972). Furthermore, one no longer can ignore whether a decision is relevant to a particular couple (Olson and Ryder, 1970), nor the various levels of decision-making, e.g., as who determines who will decide (Ryder, 1972).

Other dimensions of power which have been proposed in recent typologies further highlight the current conceptual complexity and confusion. For instance, Safilios-Rothschild (1972) presented nine dimensions of power: authority, decison-making, influence, resource power, expert power, affective power, dominance power, tension management power and moral power. Robert Ryder (1972) saw power as designating three classes of phenomena: 1) assertive, manipulative or yielding behavior, 2) overt

or implied role attribution, and 3) real power which can be broken down into contingency power, cost-effectiveness power, availability of resources, and evaluation of outcome.

Typologies of power originating outside the area of family studies provide even more concepts. Taking a phenomenological stance, Rollo May (1972) described a continuum of five types of power ranging from simplicity and destructiveness at one end to complexity and constructiveness at the other, i.e., exploitive power, manipulative power, competitive power, nutrient power and integrative power. Findings from small group research were translated by Phyllis Hallenbeck (1966) into five ways of looking at family power: reward power, coercive power, authority or legitimate power, referrent power and expert power.

In short, the construction of theory about family power is progressing in the manner predicted by Broderick where it is evolving into "complex, multivariate models, with nonlinear and noncontinuous functions, and with the specification of richer typologies of family structure and developmental sequences" (Broderick, 1971; p. 150).

The empirical investigation of marital power can be roughly divided into two historical phases. The early phase has been thoroughly criticized by Safilios-Rothschild (1970). Briefly stated, these criticisms suggest that: decision-making items have been arbitrarily chosen without attempting to determine their relevance to the families being questioned; only one member of each family, usually the wife, was interviewed, thus ignoring the perceptions of the husband and children; and lastly, the calculation of an overall decision-making score distorted the relative importance and

frequency of the decisions. In summary, a simplistic methodological approach was no longer tenable, i.e., a researcher could not give one instrument to one member of a family, which taps only one dimension of power and claim to have studied marital or family power.

More recent studies have taken into account some of the conceptual and methodological innovations, resulting in the second, more sophisticated phase of power research (e.g., Olson, 1969; Olson and Rabunsky, 1970; Olson and Ryder, 1970; Turk and Bell, 1972). Various dimensions of power were tapped using different types of measures; attempts at insuring the relevance of items for respondents were made; and both husbands and wives, and sometimes even children were included. Instead of clarity, however, these more complex methodologies resulted in contradictory findings. For instance, different family members responded differently to the same items, and there were low or no correlations between the different measures. This lack of congruence was considered a failure of both conceptualization and measurement.

A Realistic Approach

In assessing the current state of the power literature, several reactions are possible. One could become quite enthusiastic now that most of the past naiveté has been exposed, and take up the challenge of embarking on new strategies for theory building (e.g., Broderick, 1971; Burr, 1973) and of developing better conceptualizations and measures of power. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done, as is evidenced by reserving this tact as a recommendation for future (i.e., someone else's) research. Another suggestion prompted by the frustration and confusion

is to abandon the notion of power both theoretically and empirically (Turk, 1974). While these first two alternatives may appear to be at opposite extremes, both result in avoidance and inactivity.

A compromise has been submitted which would contain further research in this area until conceptual clarity has been reached (Sprey, 1972; Turk and Bell, 1972). This suggestion, however, poses a double-bind since theory construction and research are really complementary activities (Glazer and Strauss, 1967; Merton, 1968; Burr, 1973). A similar caution was to delay marital power research until better methodology, especially measurement, was developed (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970). Granted that development of better measures is a necessary quest, it should not halt or stifle empirical inquiry since research is essential for both substantive and methodological advancement.

What the present authors propose is not revolutionary, but neither is it reactionary. It is a realistic approach which contends that grand conceptual and methodological breakthroughs do not happen all at once. Small and often tenuous steps are required. At this critical point in the study of marital power, this includes reexamining our theoretical assumptions and empirical expectations, as well as "making do with what we have".

Two of the major criticisms of past methodologies decry the findings that: 1) husbands and wives answer the same questions differently, and 2) there have been low or even no correlations between instruments claiming to measure the same thing. Underlying the first point is the assumption of an objective reality which different subjects should perceive identi-

cally, or at least similarly. Larson (1974) has taken some difficult, first steps here and concluded that differential perceptions should be expected from different family members, and that the patterns of similarities and differences in perceptions are themselves crucial pieces of information for understanding many family processes.

This paper provides additional support for Larson's contention. It also addresses itself to the second point which unfortunately views correlations as isolated statistics which must be impressive enough to stand alone. Instead of looking at only the size of individual correlations, we have adjusted our quantitative expectations on the basis of the hypothesized amount of coincidence between the concepts being correlated; and we have paid attention to the patterns among correlations as a primary source of information. These patterns we speak of have been made possible by the inclusion of two design features. The first is the obviously essential solicitation of both spouses' perceptions. The second is the incorporation of non-target, as well as target measures. The value of non-target measures, even when they do not conform completely to the strict requirements of multitrait-multimethod analysis (Campbell and Fiske, 1959), is the main methodological point of this paper.

METHOD

Data Collection

Semi-structured interview and questionnaire data were gathered for this study by trained interviewers during 1972-1973. The interviewers were male and female college students who had received a four-week period of training and experience in interviewing skills. Collusion between

spouses was prevented by utilizing two field workers simultaneously for the interviewing of each couple. That is, while one spouse completed the questionnaire in one room of his/her own home, the other spouse was interviewed in another room by one of the field workers. The second interviewer not only remained with the spouse who was taking the questionnaire, to help interpret questions, but also acted as the observer during a joint part of the couple interview. The above efforts were undertaken to prevent contamination of the spouses' own personal perceptions.

The Sample

A systematic random sampling procedure was used to select the 331 matched pairs of married couples who consented to be interviewed in this study. The overall response rate for the interviews was 61.8 percent, which was adequate in light of the time demands for the data collection (two hours on the average) and the fact that not all households in the community contained intact married couples. For the sampling, every fourth household of every tenth city block or cluster of ten homes in the rural areas, within a county in Northeast Georgia was contacted a maximum of three times. This county encompasses an urban community of 48,000 population with another 20,000 people living in outlying small towns and rural areas.

Ninety percent of the 331 intact couples had been married only once for an average length of 15.6 years. The mean number of children per family was 2.1 with a standard deviation of 1.8 children. The age range of the spouses was 16 to 84 years with a mean of 37.9 and a standard deviation of 14.8 years. Although twenty-six percent of the respondents

had only completed high school or less, fifty-three percent had graduated from college. In addition to being well educated, the sample was also primarily Protestant (93 percent) with six percent Catholic, and less than one percent Jewish. Ninety-one of the 331 couples were black; the remainder were white.

Instruments

The measures utilized were the Interpersonal Checklist (ICL) and Blood and Wolfe's (1960) measures of decision-making and division of labor.* The limitations of measures such as Blood and Wolfe's which sum the answers to arbitrarily chosen questions have been noted above. Its use here should not be read as an endorsement or as an oversight by the authors. Rather it is an attempt to emphasize the point that instead of waiting for conceptual clarity and improved measures to appear, one can obtain worthwhile information from available instruments, especially if they are viewed and used in new ways.

The ICL was scored twice by each respondent, once to describe him/herself and then to describe his/her spouse. The ICL was designed by LaForge and Suczek (1955) and incorporated as a method of diagnosis for Level II of Leary's (1957) Interpersonal Theory of Personality. Level II is the level of "conscious communication", i.e., the individual's perceptions of himself and his world as he reports them. Data from the ICL were summarized for this study by means of two scores, dominance (DOM) and love (LOV), using the formula of Leary (1956). These scores represent the two major dimensions which were factor analyzed from several hundred terms which describe interpersonal behavior. The DOM dimension includes domin-

ant, assertive, ascendant, leading and controlling behaviors on the one hand and submissive, retiring, obsequious, unassertive and following behaviors on the other. The LOV dimension is comprised of accepting, loving, affectionate, affiliative and friendly social actions on the one end and hateful, aggressive, rejecting, punishing, attacking and disaffiliative behaviors on the other (Carson, 1969). The DOM scores then are broadly conceived to include most of the personality aspects associated with traditional concepts of interpersonal power, among which is decision-making.

Correlations between decision-making and DOM will be referred to as indicators of simple predictive validity, not convergent validity (Campbell and Fiske, 1959), because convergent validity implies a strong correlation of two independent measures of the same concept. Obviously, decision-making (especially eight decision-making questions) is not tapping the same concept as DOM, one of two global personality dimensions. Therefore only small correlations can be anticipated. Also the independence of the two measures is less than optimal, since both are pencil and paper self-reports. But they differ in response categories, the Blood and Wolfe being a 5-category Likert-type while the ICL is a dichotomous forced-choice. They also vary in the degree of ambiguity of what is being measured. That is, the Blood and Wolfe scales consist of 16 straightforward questions regarding who usually made specific decisions and did specific chores. Such questions leave self-presentation open to easy manipulation. The ICL, however, is composed of 128 diverse behavior items which are checked as present or absent. This format makes it much more difficult for someone to present

him/herself in a premeditated manner.

The LOV scores and the division of labor scores were included as the non-target measures necessary for discriminant validity. In brief, discriminant validity is established when no relationship is found between two non-target concepts or between a target and a non-target concept. No correlations suggest the such factors as social desirability and response set were not operative for non-target concepts, and therefore are less plausible explanations for correlations found between target concepts on the same measures. Thus the value of small but statistically significant correlations between target measures are enhanced by discriminant validity.

Additional support for small correlations is also available since both measures were administered to both spouses. For if from both perspectives the same patterns of predictive and discriminant validity emerge, there is even less doubt as to their meaningfulness.

THE FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of DOM and LOV scores on the ICL as reported by spouses for themselves and for their mates. Although there is general consensus that the husbands are more dominant than their wives, both sexes significantly underrated their own dominance scores in comparison to their spouses' rating of them. Specifically, the wives on the average reported their husbands 1.9 points more dominant than the husbands reported for themselves, while the husbands reported their wives 2.3 points on the average more dominant than wives reported for themselves. Paired t-tests showed both of these differences to be significant at the .001 level. These differences contrast sharply

with the virtually identical perceptions reported by spouses for LOV scores. Since LOV and DOM are computed from the same instrument, the spouses' greater accuracy in perceiving LOV suggests that the lack of congruence in their perceptions of DOM is not attributable to faulty measurement. Larson's (1974) point of expecting differences in perception of power is underscored.

Table 1 about here

Correlations between the two ICL and the two Blood and Wolfe indices are presented in Table 2. The reader will recall that both instruments contain one in ex of power: the ICL's DOM scale and Blood and Wolfe's decision-making index. As mentioned above, since decision-making is but one dimension of the global concept of dominance, high correlations were not anticipated between these two measures of power. At this point the value of including the LOV scale from the ICL and the Division of Labor index of Blood and Wolfe will become more evident. In effect, the latter non-target indices provide points of comparison to help determine whether a small correlation between the power measures signifies a real relationship or is merely artifactual.

In Table 2 the reader will notice the pattern of correlations running down the columns for the perception of decisions by both husbands and wives. Of special interest here is the lack of any significant relationship between the husbands' perception of their own DOM and their perception of their household decision-making. The fact that husbands do not see decision-making and personality dominance as being related points out the error of

relying on decision-making questions as the sole gauge of power for males (Staples, 1970). Nevertheless, both husbands' and wives' perceptions of decision-making by the wives are positively correlated with their reporting of the wives' personality dominance. And, interestingly, from both spouses' perspectives, their reports of wives' decision-making are negatively associated with the husbands' dominance as reported by their wives. In effect, these findings support the current contention that decision-making is one indicator of spousal power; however, this appears to be more valid for wives than for husbands.

Although the correlations between spousal perceptions of dominance and decision-making are small, the number and pattern of the correlations lend strength to the validity of the relationships. There are two measures of decision-making in each family: the responses of the husband and those of the wife. As can be readily seen by looking at these two columns for decision-making, the direction and intensity of the correlations with dominance are very similar.

By turning our attention in Table 2 to the non-target or non-power indices, a degree of discriminant validity for the relationship between the measures of power is established. For instance, there is no pattern of relationships between the DOM scores and respondents' perceptions of household tasks. If there were, the meaning of the correlations between DOM and decision-making would be negated. In fact, there is only one isolated significant correlation between DOM and household chores; namely, husbands' ratings of their wives' DOM is positively associated with husbands' perceptions of wives' performance of chores.

The other non-target index included for the purpose of discriminant validity was LOV. A pattern between LOV and decision-making for wives clearly emerges; but the association is negative, so it does not detract from the previously reported positive correlations between DOM and the decision-making for wives. Again from the husbands' perspective we find no relationship between their LOV and decision-making. However, in these comparisons, the lack of association is also evident from the wives' perception of their husbands' LOV. Evidently, the amount of decision-making by husbands is not seen to be related to their love or affection. But decision-making by wives is negatively related to wives' LOV scores reported by both spouses. Therefore, it would seem that as the perception of wives' decision-making increases, the perception of their LOV correspondingly decreases.

In sum, after all possible comparisons have been made, personality dominance and reports of decision-making behavior consistently stand alone in being positively related. This is true for wives as perceived by both themselves and their husbands, and for husbands as perceived by their wives.

Table 2 about here

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

At the present time many conceptual and methodological issues which have surfaced from past studies of marital power have reached a critical phase. Viewed together, these difficulties have appeared foreboding if not insurmountable. However, the findings reported above, directly addressing

several of the major issues, may result in the encouragement of some of our readers to venture back into this domain.

In no way do the authors of this study deny the need for the further development of theory and measures of marital power. But, they do hold that: 1) research on family power must continue while better theory and instruments are being cultivated; in fact, further research with available measures is an essential component of methodological and conceptual advancement; 2) patterns of discrepancies between spouses, and differences among measures should be expected and utilized in the development of new measures and theory about power.

Larson (1974) has argued that husbands and wives always differentially perceive complex, multidimensional phenomenon such as power. Larson also showed that some spousal differences are systematic and therefore constitute essential data for family research. The premise that the differences in response are the result of the complexity of power and not due to measurement error was supported by the present findings. Namely, two dimensions of personality are summarized by the ICL: dominance or power, and love or affection. Reports of spouses' perceptions on LOV were virtually identical, while both spouses significantly underrated themselves on DOM in comparison to their mates' perceptions. It seems unlikely that the same measure could be so precise on one dimension and so inaccurate on the other. Although social desirability may lead spouses to present themselves as less dominant than they actually believe themselves to be, this desire to present oneself in a more favorable light did not result in spouses inflating their own LOV scores. The most probably explanation seems to be that because of its many

dimensions and levels, some of which are quite subtle, power is perceived differently by husbands and wives.

Unfortunately, discrepancies among various measures of power have become a major source of discouragement for many researchers. Obviously, conceptual and methodological refinement is necessary to isolate and quantify the numerous dimensions involved. However, in the interim, and in working towards these eventual goals, one can carefully make use of instrumentality which is currently available.

One way of bolstering the strength of less than perfect measures is to use measures which tap non-target concepts as well as those under particular investigation. The data in Table 2 are a good case in point. In fact, not only did patterns of correlations between the two target measures (DOM and decision-making) emerge, but also the patterns were nearly identical from the perspectives of both spouses. As a result, the relationship between DOM and the eight specific decisions is small, but it appears to be meaningful and solid. Although decision-making was not related to the husbands' view of their own personality dominance, the two measures were related for husbands as viewed by their wives, and for wives as viewed by both themselves and their husbands. The more decisions wives were perceived to make, the more dominant in personality they were perceived by themselves and their husbands, and the less dominant the husbands were perceived by their wives.

Discriminant validity further strengthened these predictive relationships in that no such patterns appeared between DOM and division of labor, nor between LOV and division of labor. There was a pattern of correlations between LOV and decision-making for wives, but it was in the negative

direction. That is, the more decisions wives were perceived to make, the less loving they were perceived by themselves and their husbands.

The evidence seems to indicate that decision-making is a small but real dimension of power, at least for wives. And even though decision-making scores accounted for no more than five percent of the variance, one must remember that measurement of decision-making in this study was confined to eight items arbitrarily chosen by Blood and Wolfe (1960). It is very likely that employing the tactics of Olson and Ryder (1970) to insure more relevance of the items for the respondents would result in a greater degree of association. Particular attention should be directed toward the question raised by this study as to whether husbands view any decision-making on their part as related to their power.

While these substantive issues are of theoretical interest and empirical worth, it is well to conclude by reemphasizing the primary methodological point of this article. That is, the use of non-target measures can provide patterns of relationships. And these patterns can be more important than the absolute value of isolated correlations, especially when the multidimensionality of the target concept is such that only small correlations are expected.

In truth, we know more about the difficulties in understanding and measuring marital power than we know about marital power itself. But this state of affairs should be viewed as an impetus, not an impediment, to immediate and continuing investigations.

TABLE 1. MEAN SPOUSAL PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR OWN AND PARTNER'S DOMINANCE AND LOVE

ICL Scores[a]	SPOUSAL PERCEPTIONS											
	Male's View of Self		Female's View of Male		t-Value[b]	Significance Level	Female's View of Self		Male's View of Female		t-Value[b]	Significance Level
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
DOM Scores	6.1	6.1	8.0	5.5	5.08	.001	1.8	6.8	4.1	6.3	5.15	.001
LOV Scores	2.4	7.5	2.3	9.0	0.21	N.S.	6.3	7.6	6.3	8.5	0.00	N.S.

[a] Mathematically these scores could range from a maximum of 38.4 to a minimum of -38.4. Empirically they did range from approximately 25 to -25.

[b] Paired two-tailed t-test

TABLE 3. PEARSON PRODUCT MOMENT CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ICL-DIMENSIONS AND DECISION-MAKING AND DIVISION OF LABOR INDICES.[a]

ICL SCORES	BLOOD AND WOLFE INDICES			
	Husbands' view of decision-Making	Husbands' view of division of labor	Wives' view of decision-making	Wives' view of division of labor
Husbands' view of males's DOM				
Husbands' view of male's LOV				
Husbands' view of female's DOM	.21**	.13	.13	
Husband's view of female's LOV	-.16*		-.14	
Wives' view of female's DOM	.10		.15*	
Wives' view of female's LOV	-.16*		-.22*	-.10
Wives' view of male's DOM	-.14*		-.22	
Wives' view of male's LOV				

[a]Only correlations significant at .05 or greater are reported
* $p < .01$

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